

## 2007/11: Lisa Versacio - All Dressed Up and Everywhere To Go

contributed by Exenia R. [freelance writer / singer & dancer / design enthusiast]

Lisa Versacio, previously a designer for the fashionable, accessible West Elm stores, has created a new line for the equally popular retailer, Restoration Hardware, Inc. The collection is elegant, luxurious and perfect for anyone who has ever dreamed of living with a King. (Well, after the castle was designed by his Queen.) Welcome to the new modern. Moving beyond the familiar perspective of cold, steely surfaces into a world that is warm, plush and inviting to all. Take notice. It's a luxury thing.

The very word evokes a certain degree of elegance, reminiscent of 17th century courts and rich, silky fabrics with raised, ornate designs.

That comfy place in which one dwells, existing hopefully surrounded by things that are conducive to one's chosen lifestyle, those that evoke memories and cozy, warm feelings.

On August 11th, 2007, Restoration Hardware, Inc. officially announced the launch of the new fashion home brand Brocade Home, designed by West Elm visionary Lisa Versacio. Premiering in September with a catalog filled cover-to-cover with luxurious, boudoir-evocative images, it appeals to a more feminine audience than Versacio's last line. Adorned it may be, but it still drives home clean, spacious room for mental thought and physical lounging.

Since the targeted female market will likely respond well to both the look and the cost, the brand should help the Restoration Hardware brand build a more multi-faceted retail platform in the coming years. Priced similarly to West Elm (ranging from \$40 for smaller items like pillows to \$1700 for larger sofas, and solid middle prices like \$599 for functional work and dining tables), this brand seems to be targeting its market well with relative affordability and a unique aesthetic.

Versacio joined the company just over one year ago after working for Williams-Sonoma Inc., where she developed and launched West Elm. She was willing to submit an interview to PLiNTH & CHiNTZ, sending e-mail responses from her Blackberry Handheld while traveling. The designer remains the busy, thought-provoking, highly important creative and business savvy female. She is also, by the way, the Senior VP of New Business Development for Restoration Hardware.

EVR: When did you get the idea for and begin creating Brocade Home?

LV: About 3-1/2 yrs ago, I was in a hotel room in Miami and remember feeling - although I loved the clean space - that there needed to be a few more things in the room to warm it up and make it more interesting and a bit more sensual...that was when I initially began to conceptualize Brocade.

EVR: Is it a feminine response to the solid, masculine lines of West Elm?

LV: It was definitely a movement or an evolution from where I was with West Elm to a place that was a bit softer and a little more glamorous. It wasn't about abandoning the clean lines, but rather integrating them. It was then when I started envisioning what "softness meets strength" would look like.

EVR: West Elm's last collection had a "Feng-Shui" feel &ndash; but the sharp corners gave it a modern edge. Feng Shui enthusiasts wonder, would you ever create a similar line, but with rounded corners and more circular shapes than angles?

LV: Feng Shui is not exactly a style or look, but rather a philosophy in terms of how space and the position of an object co-exist with the energy surrounding it. There are definitely elements of Feng Shui incorporated into the Brocade aesthetic in terms of how items relate to one another and how they are situated within a space.

EVR: There is a school of Feng Shui called the "Form School" which emphasizes curved lines, and rounded corners as opposed to sharp or angular ones, because they are said to emit positive "chi." Do you ever see the minimalist style that contemporary design is becoming &ndash; with styles like West Elm &ndash; becoming softer and more rounded, perhaps more fitting to the aesthetic proposed by the Feng Shui Form School? (To clarify, this is a question on both your design and your opinion of the future of contemporary design shapes.)

LV: I DO&hellip; It is actually happening all over the place. They are cropping up as &ldquo;quiet curves&rdquo; &ndash; pieces that have softer lines converging with the more angular lines (softness meets strength). I just actually saw a West Elm patterned chair that is an evolution of the angular, graphic pattern we created several years ago &ndash; now it has a circle in the center of the pattern&hellip;

EVR: Humans are psychologically said to feel a need to fill empty spaces. Do you ever, with your clean and minimalist design, battle that desire? Why or why not, do you think?

LV: To me--simplicity encourages clarity &ndash; it always has&hellip; so I've always come from that place.

EVR: Brocade Home is very adorned and elegant. How did your fashion background [Lisa was a graduate from New York City&rsquo;s Fashion Institute of Technology] influence this?

LV: Having grown up in the fashion world, particularly with my love for textiles, has helped me to look at the home and all interiors within a fashion context. I think the fusion of fashion and interior design has been an exciting evolution and has inspired a lot more uniqueness and individuality.

EVR: Would you ever consider actually creating a fashion line?

LV: I am always open to future ideas... I love the interiors business, however, my love for textiles crosses both areas, so, it's possible!

EVR: Design and art are said to be different because one must serve a function. In interior design, do you believe the two must always merge, and when, if ever, do they separate? [Also,] Everything you make is so useful &ndash; "Is it a desk or a table?" "A stool or a nightstand?" What motivates you to create such functional design?

LV: When creating new products, I am always thinking about what the end use will be. You can have an absolutely beautiful piece of furniture &ndash; and for a few that could be enough; however, being able to combine a great aesthetic with something that can be used many ways is the difference between it being exclusive (or possibly an art object) and accessible.

EVR: Your lines are striking &ndash; but if you don't mind the question, many are curious &ndash; what does your home look like?

LV: Clean, simple, neutral &ndash; white walls, high ceilings, chandeliers and lots of natural light...

EVR: How does the use of color factor into you work? Lighting?

LV: I am personally not a big color person, wearing mostly black and white and living with mostly white, flax, silver and shades of brown. I do, however, love color and especially how it transforms fabrics and objects. My signature color palettes are never traditional, but rather sophisticated shades of mostly greens, neutrals and plums &ndash; but they are always grounded with a neutral base such as flax, white, silver or brown. Lighting can absolutely change everything and although I prefer pure, natural daylight, the sparkle of a chandelier or even a candle can transform any space, particularly at night.

EVR: Can you say as of yet when/where the first store or showroom will be? What kind of a response are you hoping for?

LV: We are looking forward to bringing Brocade Home into a physical space at some point soon. I am excited about giving our customer the opportunity to &ldquo;touch and feel&rdquo; the product first-hand in a branded environment.

EVR: I find myself better able to think in your spaces. If that is something you desire to provide, clarity of mind, then it is certainly achieved. What, if anything, do you hope to achieve for those who use your home goods in the feeling people get from your spaces?

LV: I love that you've said that.... I actually started to briefly explain earlier [see above] that a simple, clean space has always brought not only clarity, but also a sense of serenity to me. I don't think a lot of people understand how their environment can affect them. A cluttered space encourages a cluttered mind in my world and although Brocade is a little more &ldquo;decorated&rdquo; than West Elm, there is still a balance between clean lines and decoration and still plenty of room to breathe!!

These words were motivated by reflection upon the creative process. Lisa Versacio is making a statement in design by showing us something we are not used to seeing. Maybe we all should strive for similar mental clarity in our rooms, and then we, too, would never have to resist the urge to fill an empty space &ndash; a desire it seems this designer has virtually eliminated.

Using Brocade Home, you could turn a business or personal space into a luxurious getaway with the most unique, new

aesthetic on the block. A commercial featuring Beyoncé recently shot in a New York hotel already latched on to that idea, refurbishing the lobby with Brocade for the shoot (viewable at the Brocade Home website.) It is “room to breathe” - and yet enough cushion to invite, entice, romance, and seduce anyone curious enough. With come-hither hand-carving, rich colors, laser-cut chandeliers, and smooth fabrics, the furniture seems to say “Lay down. Stay a while. Converse, relax, work, enjoy...” Well, we might just take you up on that, Mr. Sofa. We just might.

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